

events, and hope that we take those lessons to heart.

The brightest spot in the war in Iraq is the performance of our troops. Day after dangerous day, they do their duty. They patrol, they seek out insurgents, they struggle to provide a secure environment for the rebuilding of that nation. Day after day, they face down their own fears and travel those lethal roads to take the battle to the enemy. However one may feel about the path that led us to Iraq, we can feel nothing but love, pride, and respect for our men and women in uniform. Whatever the circumstances under which we sent them there, through misread intelligence or misleading rhetoric, the U.S. military has gone, and gone again and again, and performed their duties with courage and dedication.

Even the scandal that now haunts the White House, and which is beginning to wash over the President's closest advisors, may give us cause for celebration, and not for any partisan reasons. As Americans, we may be thankful for living in a nation in which no man is king, to rule at his own whim and to undermine his detractors at will and without consequence. We may be thankful for our system of government, with its checks and balances between the three branches of government firmly established in our Constitution. And we may celebrate the wisdom of guaranteeing freedom of expression and the existence of a free press.

Though the wheels of government may sometimes grind exceedingly slowly, we can be grateful that they still can be pushed and cajoled into conducting their oversight functions and asserting those checks and balances. That is what keeps this country strong. President Abraham Lincoln said "Let the people know the truth and the country is safe." Whatever may be the final outcome of the investigation into possible retribution by the White House against Ambassador Wilson and his wife for Wilson's role in unmasking a fraud in the government's case for going to war in Iraq, the Nation is safer and better off for having the means for citizens, acting through their elected officials and their legal system, to challenge possible abuses of power.

So even in these dark days, there is cause for thanksgiving. I hope that the recent dip in gasoline prices will allow families to come together, pull out the good china and set a beautiful table overflowing with all the dishes that make this feast so memorable and so mouthwatering: turkey, roasted, grilled, smoked, barbecued or deep fried; stuffing in all its regional variations with herbs or oysters or sausage or cornbread; hams coated in pineapples and cloves or cured with smoke or sugar; cranberries served jellied or chopped, with oranges or not; green bean casserole with a crown of fried onions; yeast rolls or biscuits dripping with butter or gravy; sweet potatoes in

casseroles or with marshmallows and brown sugar; and pies—glorious pies with spicy pumpkin topped with whipped cream, and fruit pies in flaky shells, topped with cheese or ice cream. Americans know how to cook, and all the variations on our traditional Thanksgiving meal surely mean that this feast will never settle into routine.

Thanksgiving. Can there be a better day? It starts with parades to watch for the youngsters. Then the action in the kitchen heats up, competing with football games and the happy arrival of guests for our attention with a whole array of enticing aromas and clattering noises. The meal itself is wonderful, with family and friends around the table giving thanks and meaning it. And after the meal, in the warm glow of a full stomach, there is time for companionship as the leftovers are put away and the dishes are washed. The evenings are primed for walks in the cool weather, or short naps, or other sports, before the leftovers make their first reappearance. There are few days like this, devoted entirely to family without the distraction of, say presents at Christmas or Easter egg hunts. Thanksgiving is the one time we can really focus on all that we have to be thankful for just by looking around that table. My wife Erma and I have so much to be thankful for, and I know that she joins me in wishing a very happy thanksgiving to all Americans. May each of you, no matter how desperate your present circumstances may be, be blessed and see all that you have to be thankful for.

Mr. President, I wish you a happy Thanksgiving. I would like to close with a poem by Charles Frederick White, written in November 1895. His words serve to remind us that Thanksgivings past were not very different than today.

THOUGHTS OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving Day is coming soon,
That long remembered day
When nature gives her blessed boon
To all America.

On that glad day, in all our land,
The people, in their wake,
Give thanks to God, whose mighty hand
Deals blessings good and great.

The roast goose, steaming on the plate,
The sweet potato cobbler,
The cranberry sauce, the pudding baked,
The seasoned turkey gobbler,

All these delights and many more,
From north, south, west and east,
Do all the nation keep in store
For this Thanksgiving feast.

Alas, for those who are denied
This blessed boon of God!
May all the needy be supplied
Like Israel by the rod.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to pay tribute to one of the most effective and outstanding Members of the Senate, Sen-

ator SUSAN COLLINS of Maine. Today, Senator COLLINS cast her 2,942nd consecutive vote as a Senator, breaking the record of the former Senator from Maine, Margaret Chase Smith. In doing this, Senator COLLINS has maintained a perfect voting record since she was sworn in to the Senate in January 1997.

Senator COLLINS recently honored Margaret Chase Smith just a few weeks ago during a ceremony to unveil an official portrait of Senator Smith, a portrait entitled "The Great Lady From Maine" which now hangs proudly in the U.S. Capitol. As Senator COLLINS said in a tribute to Senator Smith at that unveiling:

For every woman serving in the Senate, Margaret Chase Smith blazed the path, but she was a special inspiration to me.

Senator COLLINS met Margaret Chase Smith as a senior in high school, participating in a Senate youth conference here in Washington. She remembers Senator Smith telling her to "stand tall for what I believed." Senator COLLINS continues to use this advice today as she chairs the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee and working for the people of Maine.

I know I speak for all of my colleagues in the Senate when I congratulate her on this truly remarkable accomplishment.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, freedom continues to advance in Afghanistan. Of course, they are a great ally in the war on terror. In fact, I recall visiting Afghanistan just a little over 2 years ago with the current occupant of the Chair, and we had an opportunity to see firsthand the progress they had made at that time, not to mention how far they have come since.

A few days ago the results of that country's historic parliamentary elections, held in mid-September, were officially certified. At the time that Senator BURNS and I were there, they had not yet had the election of the President, not officially. They have since had that election. Now they have had a parliamentary election. Those results are now certified. A joint Afghan and United Nations election commission has declared the winners in races for 249 seats in the lower parliamentary house, as well as members of 34 provincial councils around the country.

Afghanistan's continued progress toward democracy is obviously a victory in the war on terror. Four years ago, the ruthless Taliban regime ruled Afghanistan with an unyielding, murderous intolerance, and they laid down that country's welcome mat to all the terrorists to "come on in." I would like to remind my colleagues that 4 short years ago Afghanistan was ruled by a regime so intolerant that as part of an effort to erase any trace of Afghanistan's history before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Taliban destroyed two priceless Buddhist statues. These statues had been carved into the